PEACE STUDIES PAPERS THIRD SERIES

Whose Peace Process?
Women's Organisations and Political Settlement in Northern Ireland, 1996 - 1997

Ruth Jacobson

September 1997

UNIVERSITY OF
BRADFORD

DEPARTMENT OF PEACE STUDIES

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Abbreviations

CLMC: Combined Loyalist Military Command; loyalist paramilitary co-ordinating body formed in 1991

DUP: Democratic Unionist Party; led by Reverend Ian Paisley

IRA: Irish Republican Army; also referred to as the Provisional IRA or "provos", formed in late 1969/early 1970 after a split with the Official IRA

NIWC: Northern Ireland Women's Coalition

RUC: Royal Ulster Constabulary; the Northern Ireland police force

SDLP: Social Democratic and Labour Party; the largest nationalist party in Northern Ireland, led by John Hume

SF: Sinn Fein (meaning 'Ourselves Alone' in the Irish language); republican party close to the IRA, led by Gerry Adams

UUP: Ulster Unionist Party; the largest unionist party, led since 1995 by David Trimble

Foreword and Acknowledgement

The field work for this research started with my first-ever trip to Northern Ireland in July 1996. When I landed at Belfast, I considered myself to be a relatively well-informed feminist researcher, who could bring the weight of her experience in conflict situations in Southern Africa to bear on the task ahead. Events very quickly proved me wrong - if I had been arriving at the International rather than the City airport, my passage would have been blocked as protest around Orange marches exploded around the province. From this point onwards, I have been confronted with the realisation of how I had allowed myself to place the entire history of the last twenty five years outside the category of political and social comprehensibility, resulting in a situation where I had a better grasp of the causes of the Angolan civil war than events in what - for better or worse - constitutes part of my own political and social history.

I would like, therefore, to acknowledge all those people who over the past year have patiently pointed the way towards a better, but not, of course, complete, understanding. The support of the Nuffield Foundation for the Social Sciences was crucial in allowing the field work on women's organisations which, I hope, gives a sense of lived reality to this briefing.

Ruth Jacobson
Research Associate
Department of Peace Studies
University of Bradford

September 1997

Introduction

This paper does not deal with the causal factors of the Northern Ireland conflict nor with the likely outcomes of the political process as at the time of writing [mid-1997]. Despite the enormous and deeply-rooted desire for a political settlement which would bring an end to the conflict on the part of the majority of Northern Ireland's population, the actual path to peace remains intensely contested. The paper's principal objective is therefore to examine to what extent and in what form women have been involved in this process of contestation through their organisations and groupings. However, as anywhere else, it is impossible to make assumptions about a single, monolithic category of 'Northern Irish women' without taking into account manifold differences, whether of age, class or sexual orientation, which may shape their lives just as decisively as those more obviously related to the conflict, such as religion.

At the same time, there is a growing recognition that women's experiences, attitudes and aspirations in the Northern Ireland conflict, as elsewhere, "have so frequently been neglected in analyses of our situation or subsumed into composite pictures which are actually based on data collected predominantly from men".[1] This knowledge gap gives at least some justification for the summary processes detailed at the start of Section Two, on which the field work for this paper was based. The primary research objective was therefore empirical: to document developments in Northern Ireland during the research period from the perspective of women's organisations. However, it is emphatically not suggested that the organisations reported on below are 'representative' in any statistically significant sense. On the contrary, it is often through their very *un*representativeness - for example, by being prepared to go against the grain on issues such as abortion - that they allow insights. My aims were to capture as much of their conceptualisations of what 'peace' in Northern Ireland would look like. This was done through looking at their involvement in actual party political activity set against the broader context of political life.

In addition, the paper is intended as a contribution to the field of gender and politics. It draws on those feminist critiques which have demonstrated the extent to which women's political participation has been described by means of a model which was both conceptually and methodologically flawed.[2] These critiques have made clear that the distinction between public and private spheres, one of the most central conceptualisations upon which modern political theory rests, cannot be sustained when women 'escape' the confines of the home and demand recognition as citizens or political actors in their own right. Miller et al have examined women's political participation in Northern Ireland and, by integrating the "relatively unstructured and fragmented areas within which women operate",[3] have effectively debunked the dominant myth of 'active men' and 'passive

women', while other researchers have insisted on the relevance of 'private' domestic violence to the notion of the political.[4]

There is a particular concern with the fact that, in common with women in many other situations of violent conflict, women in Northern Ireland have frequently been portrayed as more moderate in their views than men, and as actual or potential peacemakers. However, women's organisations and groupings in Northern Ireland have not demonstrated this in any categorical form: on the contrary, some have implicitly or explicitly supported the use of violent means to sustain patterns of life which they feel to be integral to their wellbeing. The paper aims, therefore, to explore the contradictions and tensions which this situation creates and which have an immediate political content as, for example, over the decommissioning of weapons by banned organisations.

The research was premised on the position that women's organisations constitute a window onto the broad range of relationships which impact on 'the body politic'. At the basic level, their members need to venture outside the domestic sphere to participate, even if it is within a circumscribed space which is still seen as essentially limited to women's family responsibilities. Even when they prefer to reject categorisation as 'political', their activities can effectively amount to a critique of the status quo and an affirmation of an alternative vision which has specific implications for political choice. At the same time, it is important not to romanticise women's organisations as *inherently* working in the direction of peace.

Gender and Political Violence in Northern Ireland

The period between 1969 and the ceasefires of 1994[5] has resulted in almost 3,200 deaths directly attributable to the political violence, of which 200 were women[6]. With an overall population of only one and half million, it is obvious that a considerable proportion of families have direct experience of bereavement, injury, emotional and economic loss. While it may appear that the violence has impacted far less heavily on women, there are acute problems of delineating where the boundaries of violence fall when gender relations are involved. As noted, feminist analysis insists that 'public' and 'private' violence cannot be seen as entirely self-contained. There may be a relationship between, for example, the accessibility and use of guns and violence against women. This means that accounts of conflict need to be gendered in a form which does not just list numbers and sex of victims or perpetrators. How, for example, does 'being a real man' affect the outcome of confrontation? In what ways are 'our women' being protected?

This paper cannot go into detail about to what extent the dichotomous terminology of 'Protestant' versus 'Catholic' is adequate to the complex reality of conflict, but Appendix II gives some of the

historical contextualisation. The category of *unionist* will be used as a political identity overlapping with and reinforced by the Protestant religion and denoting a commitment to maintaining Northern Ireland's integration into the British state, expressed by electoral support for the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), or the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). It encompasses people who see themselves as being in the middle ground of politics as well as those who take a stronger stance but who do not overtly condone the use of violence. Unionism in its more extreme expressions tends to label itself *loyalism* and can now be encountered in new political parties such as the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP). Historically, the unionist/Protestant population has always been in a majority in Northern Ireland and has controlled the machinery of state, but their previous demographic dominance has now been reduced to approximately 60%.

The minority population is characterised by an historical association with Catholicism (and, to a lesser extent, to the culture and language of Ireland). The *nationalist* position supports the end of a united Ireland and substantial change within the institutions of Northern Ireland, but not by use of violence. Their electoral voice over the recent decades has been the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). *Republicanism* can endorse the use of armed action but its political expression has been through Sinn Fein (SF), although the boundaries between the SDLP and SF votes have become more complex in recent years. However, as writers such as Todd and Ruane[7] have established, far from being 'written in stone', these categories are historically-grounded and multi-dimensional.

In terms of recent history, the formation of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement in the late 1960s was a turning point for many Catholic women. Prior to this, their experiences had been the complex of Unionist party control through the Stormont government, with its control over basic civil rights in terms of electoral representation, the allocation of municipal housing, public sector employment and, as in the case of parades, public space. This is vividly remembered by older women, including present-day activists such as the Sinn Fein councillor in Derry/Londonderry[8] who ruefully recalled that:

> We used to go out on the streets demanding 'One man, one vote - I don't think we even questioned then, what about one woman. And when we started to do it, then we ran straight into trouble with our own men....

The ensuing period of 'the Troubles' erected barriers between women which have been extremely hard to dismantle. For example, any Protestant woman criticising police practice makes herself a target for accusations of 'disloyalty' to unionism.

The population of Northern Ireland, including those who do not share any majority religions, or are from totally different backgrounds, such as the small Chinese community, has experienced

violence as a result of the presence of the forces of the British state (police and army); random bomb attacks; sectarian attacks from Republican or Loyalist paramilitaries; punishment attacks for perceived transgressions, including fraternisation with British soldiers. These experiences have not by any means been solely confined to women as passive victims of violence; women have been 'on the frontline' in the full meaning of the term.[9]

However, it is still not appropriate to categorise Northern Ireland as a society at war. A high percentage of the violence has been extremely localised within areas of Belfast, Derry/Londonderry and certain rural areas bordering the Republic of Ireland. One of the distinctive features of this conflict has been the accommodation of conflict, through the maintenance of separate spheres of life for Protestant and Catholic populations. This is examined in more detail below. This paper will demonstrate some of the ways in which women have been involved in efforts to demolish these barriers *and* to maintain them.

Section One: Locating Women's Experiences

"Women's Place" - Outside Politics?

When looking at gender in Northern Ireland, certain specific socio-economic as well as political features need to be taken into account. Comparative social surveys indicate that it remains among the most conservative areas of Western Europe.[10] There are strong constraints on women to conform to ideological constructions which place them above all as 'wives and mothers', albeit with features distinctive to the separate communities, as outlined below. Women have been less integrated into the labour market[11], thus helping to maintain a parcelling of the world into a public sphere inhabited by men and the private world of the family, from which they are expected to derive their over-riding purpose in life.

Even taking this into account, I find that the figures for women's formal political representation remain startling[12], particularly when set against contemporaneous developments in Britain and the Republic of Ireland[13]:

> Northern Ireland currently has no women representatives at Westminster or in Europe
>
> Since its creation under the terms of the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, only three women have served as MPs for Northern Ireland's Westminster constituencies
>
> During the entire course of elections to the Stormont government, lasting almost 50 years (until 1972), a total of 4% of candidates were women. By its end, the proportion of women candidates had dwindled to 2%, matching the figure of the first 1921 election

Even at the local level, usually more 'woman-friendly', only 12% of district councillors are women.[14]

At the same time, while statistics on actual representation do have their story to tell, as Miller et al have observed, "women are not content to acquiesce, lingering dutifully outside the men's rooms where what passes for politics takes place".[15] There have, in fact, almost certainly been instances where women have also been highly involved but have nevertheless slipped from the record. One example is the Ulster Worker's Council strike of 1974 which brought down the power-sharing initiative, where the archetypal 'worker' is consistently represented as male, despite evidence that women workers were also present throughout.[16] More recently, some of the majority parties have shown a concern about gender issues. Sinn Fein has been the first to introduce a gender quota (40% of places on its National Exective - *Ard Comhairle)*; the SDLP followed suit in June 1995 with 40% on its Party Executive. Both have adopted positive action in the form of training and development courses.[17] The UUP acknowledges that women's position in their party needs to be enhanced but has no explicit provision for quotas. However, recent elections indicate the depth of the structural problems involved, as illustrated in Section Two. Thus the 1994 ceasefires took place within a context where women who wanted to enter the formal political process which was to deliver 'peace' faced an uphill task.

It must be emphasised, though, that the exclusion of women from the formal political process has only ever been one facet of the Northern Irish political scene. It is commonplace for people to recall that:

> In the past, all the Unionist MP had to do to be re-elected was to appear at election time, wave a Union Jack and shout "This we will maintain" and that was it... We never saw him again...

In recent years, formal (party) politics has increasingly been criticised by the population as a whole[18] for being carried out in the form of a confrontational 'zero sum game', with each side refusing to make any concessions; "Not an inch" and "No Surrender" are the by-words.[18]

The Significance of Religious Affiliation

There can be no doubt that religious observance is a distinctive feature of Northern Ireland. A woman recalled the shock of discovering, when she moved to England, that she was mocked for her preference for going to church on Sundays rather than 'relaxing':

> For me, being brought up in Northern Ireland, going to church was something you just did as a natural part of life, like learning to do up your shoelaces as a child.

Tables 1.A and 1.B show that the Northern Ireland population contains a higher proportion of frequent church attenders than the UK as a whole, and that women attend more than men.

TABLE 1.A: CHURCH ATTENDANCE[19]

	NI %	UK %
Frequent	58	15
Regular	10	7
Rare	32	78

TABLE 1.B: GENDER AND CHURCH ATTENDANCE

	NI %		UK %	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Frequent	39	61	37	63
Regular	57	43	35	65

There is an undeniable connection between religious affiliation and configurations of gender relations. A Catholic upbringing will involve the elevation of the Virgin Mary, often presented in iconography as the Virgin Queen of Ireland and combined with the metaphor of the age-old suffering of "Mother Ireland". This is obviously not shared with Protestantism, where the worship of the Virgin Mary is strongly condemned. However, the practice of Protestantism allows for Biblical justification for male dominance within the family in the image of 'the stern but just father' and women whose compliance with the demands of 'the good mother' demonstrates their godliness. The implications for women's sexuality and their capacity for agency outside the family are obvious, and cut across the spectrum of Protestant-Unionist-Loyalist versus Catholic-Nationalist-Republican.

In this way, attendance at church and participation in its activities are so closely linked with the maintenance of 'normal' lives in Northern Ireland that it is clearly impossible to isolate doctrinal differences per se as the critical factor of women's experiences At the same time, I feel that a wholesale dismissal of religious affiliation under the category of 'social conditioning' does not reflect the part that personal faith plays in some women's lives. As Morgan notes[20], it may impel them to seek out cross-community and peacebuilding initiatives as a form of Christian witness,

but it can *also* lead to a condemnation of such initiatives as a denial of the special truth of one's own doctrines, particularly those of personal salvation. There is thus no necessary association between a strong religious faith and an impulse towards 'peacemaking'.

The Geography of Separation

When looking at the contemporary conflict situation, it is evident that the media and research has concentrated on the two major towns of Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. Yet according to the 1991 Census, out of a total population of a little over one and a half million, only approximately. 21% live in the two major cities. The remaining 79% either live in smaller towns, many of which have a population of only a few thousand, or in the countryside. It is also vital to recognise that the Northern Ireland conflict is marked by distinct boundaries. As a result, the large majority of people do not live under a constant threat; for them, the conflict may amount to no more than occasional inconvenience in terms of disruption of transport.

They have, however, developed mechanisms which affect the entire fabric of their lives, noticeably in residential patterns, education and social/sporting activities. In overall terms, half of Northern Ireland's population lived in areas containing over 90% of one religion and only 7% in areas with roughly equal numbers. Census returns from 1991 show that in the majority of electoral wards, fewer than 10% declared themselves as members of the 'other' sector. Most public sector housing estates in the larger towns have become exclusively or almost exclusively Protestant or Catholic, so that areas which do reflect the overall 60-40 balance more closely are noteworthy.

The longstanding segregation of almost all primary and secondary schools originated in the opposition of both the Catholic and the Protestant establishments to the introduction of a purely secular state system. Over the years, the continuing resistance of the Catholic establishment combined with residential segregation to produce the patterns shown in Table 2. These figures suggest the institutional and resource constraints involved in overcoming the patterns of separation, even though successive opinion polls have indicated that up to half of parents would actually prefer their children to be educated in integrated schools.

TABLE 2: SEGREGATION IN EDUCATION [21]

Total enrolment 1992	Protestant	Catholic	Integrated
Primary	90,684	96,047	1,792
Secondary (non-selective)	40,945	45,282	1,390
Grammar	33,192	23,678	-

It is hardly surprising, in view of the above, that marrying someone from the other community (a 'mixed marriage') is uncommon. Analysis of four years of the Northern Ireland Social Attitudes data (1989-1994) show a figure of 6% for 'mixed marriages' i.e. between Catholics and Protestants, although this conceals considerable local variation.[22] Those who have married outside their communities may have to hide their origin and at times may face not just disapproval but physical danger, as became evident during the period of Drumcree 1996 (see Section Two).

Women's Organisations: 'Whatever you say, say nothing'[23]

Northern Ireland has a very high level of community/voluntary activity when compared to the United Kingdom, attributable at least in part to the close social cohesion of (separated) communities as well as the continuing influence of the church. A study of two small towns[24] which could be regarded as 'typical' in terms of social structure revealed a rich diversity of women's organisations. For obvious reasons, membership in groups such as Catholic or Methodist Mothers was restricted to co-religionists, but there was no reason to expect that membership in groups such as Action Cancer, Cruse or the Royal National Lifeboat Institution would not span the community as a whole. Yet in several localities, many organisations were almost totally Catholic or Protestant. The authors considered that this was more than simply a reflection of 'sub-pockets' of population distribution. Instead, they considered that it suggested that even within "geographical areas which have a mixed population many non-denominational organisations actually evolve in ways which result in their having a membership almost exclusively from one community or the other".[25]

The absence of cross-community membership is not necessarily a deliberate process of exclusion; it grows out of family and friendship patterns inherent in a divided society and results in a situation where attempts at cross-community inititiatives are seen as unnecessary or undesirable. One leader of a church group who was a university graduate explained that she would not consider attending any Women's World Day of Prayer services because: "I would not feel comfortable in this situation, nor would I encourage women to do this".[26]

'Security' , Parades and Paramilitaries

Despite the caveat above, it remains central to this study that, from the late 1960s, Northern Ireland has endured multi-faceted armed conflict, with random murders of civilians, bombs in shopping centres and bars, politicians shot down and British troops and security forces routinely targeted. In this context, it is understandable that for certain Catholic and Protestant communities, the paramilitary groups in their midst acquired the status of defenders and arbiters, particularly in

nationalist areas where the police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), has been experienced as the arm of an oppressive state. Historically, the RUC was almost entirely a Protestant force with a high percentage of policemen also closely associated with the Orange Order. Any potential for achieving shifts in its composition have been blocked by the Troubles which have kept Catholic membership below 10%. Despite some major changes in policing practice, the RUC still lacks legitimacy in most nationalist communities and this is of course intensified during periods of high tensions, such as those around Orange parades.

It is hardly necessary to point out the association between the operations of the paramilitaries and affirmation of masculinity, in terms of uniforms, display of weapons, etc.[27] Their 'punishments' range from pronouncements of local and national banishments, to beatings and maimings (particularly of the kneecaps) with baseball bats or gunshots. These are justified in terms of the need to preserve the community's wellbeing against drug-dealers or burglars, but it is widely acknowledged that they also take the form of personal vendettas. Women may find their sexual conduct is policed by threat, particularly if they are the partners of men in prison or partners of the paramilitaries themselves. Any local opposition from women or men brings a high level of risk. In general, political violence in Northern Ireland has produced a situation where women are in a situation where their 'security' demands, at the least, acquiescence with the operations of their paramilitary 'defenders'. Acquiescence should never, however, be interpreted as unconditional support where the costs of opposition are so high.

In situations of interface between the two communities, symbolic affirmations also carry considerable implications for security and threat. The outstanding instance has been the history of the parades associated with the 'the loyal orders' or 'the Orange'.[28] Their parades punctuate the Northern Ireland calendar, noticeably during the marching season of July and have unmistakeable overtones of intimidation against the Catholic population. Historically, the links between the Orange order, the Ulster Unionist Party and the Stormont state had ensured that any attempts to express opposition could be countered by the force of the police and of local magistrates. The civil rights movement started making different demands on public space, which in turn provoked a violent reaction. In recent years, Catholic communities have mounted largescale protest against the passage of these parades through their areas.

Generations of women have experienced these encounters in terms of gender, religion and class. In small, close-knit Protestant communities, if any male or female family member disassociated themselves from Orange activities, it would have been a cause for social disapproval. The only form of membership available for Protestant women in the Orange Order has always been that of support and welfare activities, so they have never participated in any executive role. At the same

time, women have positive memories of the material help and social activities they associate with their membership. Until recently, women would be aware that their husband's membership of an order could be vital for their professional, managerial or political progress. With the decline of Protestant domination in the civil service, and the diminishing importance of manufacturing, membership has become less important.

Along with this decline, however, there has been a growth in the membership of marching bands, which have always been associated with the Orange Orders but operate autonomously and are distinguished by differences of generation and public image. Instead of soberly-suited, bowler hatted local dignitaries and tradesmen bearing rolled up umbrellas, the young male bandsmen enjoy living up to their description as 'Blood and Thunder' and 'Kick the Pope[29] ' bands. Their rehearsals and outings can form the focus of social life for young people, particularly in smaller towns and rural areas. They are male dominated, with a particular emphasis on the strength needed to carry and perform on the huge 'Lambeg drum', but girls can be involved through carrying the bands' marching flags. Girls may also see their involvement with band members as giving them group status and the chance to escape the confines of the local community and watchful parents.[30]

In areas where parades have become contentious, it has become common to find women from a Protestant background stating in interviews that Catholic opposition to the Orange marches is a recent phenomenon which is being "whipped up" for political ends. Their recollections are that, "Everybody [i.e. including Catholics] used to come out to enjoy the music". This is not consistent with the accounts given by Catholic women, often to do with memories of fear, confined inside their houses while listening to the drums and anti-Catholic songs and slogans.

In terms of security, it has always been possible for middle class families to remove themselves to safer areas within Northern Ireland and, in recent years, this has been the route for an increasing number of the Catholic middle class. The ultimate removal is, of course, that of emigration, as a woman from a Protestant working class background recalled:

> I never had time for all the loyalist nonsense. The murals, the red-white-and blue kerbstones, the Twelth of July marches - they made me sick ...I ignored the violence. It wasn't being waged on my behalf... I took the university route out ...[31]

Where this is not an option, living with sectarianism can have an ineradicable effect on women's lives. As the work of The Cost of the Troubles project is discovering[32], there is an enormous unexpressed emotional burden. One example is the aftermath of the killing of five Catholic men by loyalist paramilitaries inside a betting shop in Belfast's Lower Ormeau Road; the following year, marchers on the July 12 Orange march held up five fingers when passing by the shop and a

woman was seen dancing in celebration. Local women express their willingness to support an intransigent opposition to subsequent marches as a way of expressing their outrage.

The heartfelt relief felt at the IRA and subsequent Loyalist ceasefires of late 1994 left this burden largely untouched. It was noticeable to me that in press interviews, women who had lost husbands and sons all stressed the need for forgiveness and reconciliation, with the emphasis on their 'motherhood'. The possibility exists that men remain more 'licensed' to express anger than women. But the grief at the breakdown of the ceasefires is unmistakeable; a woman whose 17 year old son had been shot by loyalist paramilitaries remembered that she "burst into tears. It was a cold night but I went to the grave. I asked Gavin to save us and bring back the peace".[33]

Section Two: Women's Organisations and the Peace Process, June 1996 - June 1997

To recap, the principal objective of this research was to monitor the actual political process in Northern Ireland from the perspective of women's organisations inorder to establish their perceptions of what would constitute 'peace' in Northern Ireland. This entailed carrying out a research programme which could cover:.

1. the constitutional political parties operating within Northern Ireland plus groupings of women associated with a particular political position within their own communities (including that of illegal organisations)

2. organisations with membership restricted to women which take a public position on the peace process, and those groupings of women which are participating in initiatives between separated communities, generally referred to as 'cross-community work'. Whether religious or secular, these are challenging the status quo with their own neighbourhoods

3. the Northern Irish Women's Movement. This is not in any way formally constituted but is identifiable in terms of distinctive objectives and methods of operation such as the creation of women-only spaces, an absence of hierarchical structures (and a chronic lack of funds!)

Research data from each category will be presented in turn, followed by an evaluation of their perception of and contribution to 'the peace process'. Due to the framing of the research in terms of political settlement, Category 1 needs detailed separate attention, but within the actual fabric of women's lives there are overlapping and mutually reinforcing elements at work.

Clearly, there can be no claim that the following data is definitive. It is based on a series of field trips involving observations of marches and political events, the activities of women's organisations

and individual women in Belfast, Derry/Londonderry and smaller towns but, regrettably, no rural areas. In addition, I carried out a regular survey of local newspapers which are a point of reference for the majority of the population, and which often produce comment in the form of letters to the editors, features and news reports not found in the coverage of the British national press.[34] Where it was compatible with my researcher status, I participated in actual events, such as the International Women's Day presence outside the Harryville Catholic Church.

Field work started in mid-1996, by which time the atmosphere created by the dual 1994 ceasefires had been shattered by the IRA bombs in Canary Wharf and Manchester. The loyalist ceasefire was still in operation, but there was at best an uneasy peace. The Northern Ireland elections of May 30 were intended to make it possible to re-establish the multi-party negotiations on the basis of electoral legitimacy but they were still foundering on the point of the decommissioning of IRA weapons. The province was bracing itself for the annual period of Orange marches.

With this backdrop, it is not surprising that women's comments on 'the peace process' were tinged with doubt and apprehension. Even without this, however, their reflections on the post-ceasefire period were complex. Most continued to look back to the immediate post-ceasefire period as something exceptional in their lives, even where expressed in mundane ways:

> People from Catholic areas went over to Ballymena to look at the new shops, which they would never have done before [because Ballymena is in Ian Paisley's constituency] ... and Protestants went down on the train to Dublin, for the first time ever ...

At the organisational level, there continued to be a growth of cross-community initiatives which saw themselves as not dependent on the formal political process. At the same time, professional and voluntary community workers were intensely aware that the paramilitaries were continuing to 'police' their communities through punishment beatings.[35] Some women reflected that the arrival of 'peace' had only highlighted the depths of the economic and social problems facing Northern Ireland:

> Living in Northern Ireland during the ceasefire was like walking through a beautiful garden. It looks lovely but when you turn up the stones, there are horrible things underneath.

Chronology of Conflict: The Siege of Drumcree 1996

This episode was to set the terms of much of the subsequent developments around parading and was particularly significant for a number of women's organisations. It refers to the events in the small town of Portadown where the route of the local Orange Order's parade on their return from the church at Drumcree covers an area which is now the site of a Catholic housing estate (the

Garvaghy Road). This had caused tensions in previous years, and in early July 1996 it appeared that a decision had been taken by the Royal Ulster Constabulary to block this section of the route. Other Orange Order members and supporters then flooded into the area and mounted a challenge to the RUC, keeping up a constant barrage of abuse and threats against the police at the barricades.[36] The immediate face of this violence was virtually entirely male; press photos and television showed a sea of male faces confronting police barricades. Apart from passing references to 'tea and sandwich makers', no attempt was made to find out the degree of involvement of Protestant women. Loyalist reaction escalated until it amounted to a civil insurrection, with free movement to ports and airports blockaded, along with local suspension of free movement throughout the province, with those in charge of the barricades dictating who should or should not be allowed to pass. Once again, the 'public' face was of men 'protecting' their communities, although there are some documented instances of women's involvement in 'manning' road blocks.[37]

As citizens and workers, Drumcree affected women's civil rights, professional commitments and personal lives. At a press conference called by the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, examples were given of care workers who had entreated those mounting the blockades to let them through to attend to elderly and disabled people but had been refused; this aspect was not highlighted in the general press coverage. There were also some specifically gendered features of the mounting scale of intimidation. Numbers of single parents (an overwhelmingly female category in Northern Ireland as elsewhere) had taken advantage of the ceasefire to find more suitable accommodation for their families in previously 'unsafe' areas, and these became particularly vulnerable targets as tensions rose.

When the RUC reversed its decision and allowed the march down the Garvaghy Road, women residents were amongst those forcibly removed. The situation then escalated out of control. The retrospective assessment of the Northern Ireland journal *Fortnight* was damning:

> In the burning, shooting and rioting that tore the province apart for eight days, it is a miracle that only two people died ... Both corpses grimly bookended a week that will go down in memory as when NI decided to reject any notions of reconciliation, of respecting difference, of running itself democratically.... This time, *everybody* [not just the paramilitaries] joined in, in a warped orgy of participatory democracy gone mad... No-one, absolutely no-one, is innocent. But some are less innocent than most.[38]

Should one be trying to assess the 'innocence' or otherwise of women during this period? There are eye witness accounts attesting to women's participation in intimidation and burning; at the same time, I was given several instances where women had intervened on behalf of beseiged families, at the least to ensure that if the 'intruders' promised to leave speedily, they would not be harmed. Perceptions of this period ran along pre-existing divides but had a new element, since

even middle class Catholic women, previously insulated from the conflict, saw the treatment meted out to the Garvaghy Road residents as an indicator of how the British state would, ultimately, always line up against nationalists. Some Protestant women described the period to me as a stand against encroachments on their 'human rights' which had been eroded to the point where drastic action was justifiable.

Continuing Tensions

After the high drama of July, there were some unanticipated compromises around the marches of August and as the marching season drew to an end, Northern Ireland entered a period 'between peace and war'. Some areas were marked by a higher security presence in response to the resumption of IRA attacks. Cross-community initiatives continued, but more cautiously; as one woman commented:

> Repairing the bridges torn down in the flood of sectarianism we witnessed this summer of '96 will take tremendous courage and goodwill on the part of everyone...Do we stand in the relative safety of our own community, gaze into open wounds inflicted by 'the other side'... [o]r do we acknowledge that it has been difficult for all of us, reflect on and accept the consequences of our action - collectively?[39]

Additionally, some areas were marked by considerable tension because of boycotts of Protestant businesses and a spate of attacks on sites such as churches and Orange Halls.[40] The Catholic church at Harryville was picketed every Saturday night for months on end (see below). Within the party political arena, the procedures established by the May elections functioned but without any prospect of transforming the longterm political context. It was widely perceived, with good reason, that the Conservative government's dependence on Ulster Unionist votes precluded any action. Labour's election in May 1997 with its majority was thus seen as a possible turning point. New positions on decommissioning, along with the appointment of Marjorie 'Mo' Mowlam as Secretary of State, suggested there might be a political breakthrough in the offing, but apprehension remained high about the forthcoming marching season.

Category 1: The Political Processes

The formation of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition [henceforth the Coalition] in the first part of 1996 served to highlight once again the absence of women from the political arena. Their central claim, as contained in their Election Manifesto, was that:

> ...[t]he Women's Coalition is dedicated to drawing together the different views, ideas and options to achieve a workable solution. Over the years of violence women have

been very effective in developing and maintaining contact across the various divides in our society...In doing this women have seen themselves as agents of change.

The Coalition worked out its position on policy areas through a series of discussion meetings. The resulting position to be adopted by their candidates was that the constitutional issue - whether Northern Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdon - should be put 'on hold' in order to allow a real process of negotiation and accommodation rather than the existing confrontational stances of the existing parties. In addition, participation in this process should not be conditional on decommissioning of weapons by any players. The guiding principle was therefore to be one of inclusion and debate rather than confrontation. This stand, while not unique, was in marked contrast to the demands of the majority unionist parties (UUP and DUP).

The claims for representation were made on the basis of women *as a category*. Despite the Coalition's short electoral campaign and lack of resources, they achieved their objective of winning sufficient votes under the complex electoral system to entitle them to a part in the formal peace process.[41] They also attracted a degree of media attention, but this tended to concentrate on the 'novelty element' at the expense of the Coalition's carefully set-out policy papers on, for example, the need to link childcare provision with economic policies based on their knowledge of the inadequacies of public provision.

The Coalition's campaign slogan of 'Wave goodbye to the dinosaurs' certainly reflected a genuine mood among Northern Ireland women. However, it is important to register that the advent of the Coalition was by no means universally greeted by other women involved in politics. They were criticised from both sides for their refusal to enter into the constitutional debate. After the campaign, Iris Robinson, prominent in unionist politics, commented, "They are doing their best to destroy anything that smacks of Unionism or Protestantism. Thank God only 7,000 idiots voted for these women."[42] There were also criticisms from within the women's movement, albeit in more temperate terms than Iris Robinson's.[43] The election was by proportional representation, and the Coalition had to concentrate on placing their candidates so as to produce 10,000 votes and an assured place. This was seen in other quarters as divisive and 'playing the system'. A nationalist SDLP councillor and activist, Brid Rogers stated this as "The problem with NI is how to accommodate two clashing aspirations. To do this you need a clearly worked out idea of how that will be done ...[T]here are women who have worked their way up through political parties despite the difficulties. Now they're facing another woman for the same vote."[44]

The degree to which the majority parties contesting the election were committed to promoting women as candidates was tested by selection procedures which resulted in the figures shown in Table 3. The situation was further complicated by the placing of those women who were selected

as candidates in positions low down the party lists under the system of proportional representation. Thus, for example, although Sinn Fein nominated a woman for the Foyle constituency within Derry/Londonderry, she was placed in a position which made it highly unlikely that she would be elected, while in the same town local SDLP voters were surprised to find that the former Mayor, Annie Courtney, was not even selected, even though she had topped the poll in her ward in the local elections of 1993. These developments all gave the Coalition ample ammunition to support its claim to be the only party which could *ensure* women's presence in the negotiations.

TABLE 3: WOMEN AS CANDIDATES

Party	Total Candidates	% Women Candidates
DUP	54	15
SF	69	32
SDLP	74	27
UUP	78	9

All Sisters Together?

In the event, the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue fell far short of the aspirations of its title. It opened its sessions in June, meeting in public one day a week; technically, it had 110 members but Sinn Fein never took its seats and the SDLP withdrew within weeks. This left the Ulster Unionists and the DUP in a position to dominate the 15 other members representing the other five small parties. There were interminable procedural wranglings and frequent rancorous outbreaks at anyone bold enough to insist on trying to maintain the original purpose of the Forum. One of the Coalition's elected representatives, Monica McWilliams, summed it up "It is a very nasty place to be at times. There have been days when I put my hand on my head with despair. The level of sectarian commentary is as raw as anything you'd hear in a street fight". As for female solidarity, "In the early days, if we walked into the ladies' toilets any Unionist women walked out. The only improvement is to the extent that they now remain in the toilet".

Even if the parties with a higher female presence had taken up the allocation of seats at the Forum, it would have taken a major transformation to shift established habits. In the event, the Coalition representatives were at the receiving end of attacks which were unmistakeably gendered.

They were accused of being 'out of their depth' by meddling in politics and, on one memorable occasion, for disloyalty to 'their men', at which their delegates took the only sensible course and responded with a rousing chorus of 'Stand By Your Man'. There was also some use of physical intimidation of Coalition delegates by means of shouldering and pushing [personal communication].

The proceedings of the Forum were suspended during the run-up to the General Election and the provisions establishing it lapsed in May 1997. Assessments on its achievements remained sharply divided: some political commentators felt that, despite the acrimony, useful progress had been made in the detailed committees on, for example, agriculture and the economy. Monica McWilliams commented that:

> The Women's Coalition entered this process because we believed we could make a serious political input to the current negotiations. Now it appears we have another role thrust upon us - that of exposing the bad behaviour in the Forum, much of which we have become the brunt of... On a more positive note, the Coalition has shown that it is important for women to have a public voice in the forum and to access decision-making within the political mainstream.[45]

However, Brid Rogers, an SDLP councillor and activist assessed the Forum as "[a] distraction, a very expensive toy as a sop to the unionists."[46]

Other Political Arenas: 'Business as Usual?'

Outside of the Forum, arenas for women within political parties remained. The issue of political prisoners emerged into the forefront with the arrest of Roisin McAliskey, and the subsequent conditions of her imprisonment on remand while awaiting extradition to Germany for alleged terrorist involvement.[47] She was pregnant when arrested and with a medical record such that her baby's and her own health were at risk. This pointed up once again the depth of the fault lines between parties and placed the Coalition in a difficult position. For republicans, the fundamental issue at stake was that of the illegitimate British state exercising its oppressive powers against high profile activists. A demonstration was mounted in March on International Women's Day, which I observed. It was held in the name of the Falls Road Women's Centre, sited within a strongly republican area. Banners simply demanded the 'release' of Roisin and the occasion appeared to me to be more concerned with mounting a republican presence than observing the spirit of the day.

On the other hand, women associated with loyalist groups asserted privately to me that, while they would support a more humane regime in view of her condition, they were convinced of her guilt because of her background and therefore were not averse to her continued imprisonment under tight security. The Coalition, however, had to work out a position expressible in a press

release which, while avoiding attributing culpability to either party, asserted the civic and human rights of any pregnant prisoner. As one supporter commented, "If we [the Coalition] can't make a comment about that, then what *are* we here for?"

The Politics of the Streets

During the research period, there was an ongoing political process involving non-party organisations which claimed to be representing 'the community' in defined locations. Some of these were banned organisations, others have a long history of community-level involvement and others have been formed very recently - specifically to oppose the passage of Orange marches through their areas. The national and international media have concentrated on those groupings such as the Garvaghy Road Residents Association and the Lower Ormeau Concerned Community, which have taken an extremely firm stand: considerably less attention has been given to community-based organisations which have reached agreements with the local Orange Lodge by means of compromise.

The research period saw one of the periodic outbreaks of community concern over 'joy-riding' on the long, bleak roads of working class areas, particularly in Belfast. In late 1996, events in the (Catholic) Poleglass and Twinbrook housing estates led to heated community meetings involving local Sinn Fein councillors, who were asked if Sinn Fein could use its influence with the IRA to stop the punishment beatings being meted out to the teenage car thieves. SF councillor Annie Armstrong emphasised that her party was totally opposed to beatings and drew attention to SF's support for other ways of dealing with offenders, such as probation schemes.[48] An alternative view is that, in the aftermath of the ceasefires, all paramilitary groups were striving to maintain their control of the local economy, through extraction of protection money in the form of 'donations'. It was alleged that, to this end, they had deliberately upped the level of intimidation within their own localities. The case of a sixteen year old girl who was tarred and feathered and left tied to a lamp-post was cited, as were threats of kneecapping against children as young as eight [personal communications]

The tensions during the period were illustrated by the case of a loyalist woman activist prominently involved in demanding the right of Orange marches to follow their accustomed route, which had resulted in confrontations with the RUC.[49] While emphasising that she did not condone violence, she displaced the greater part of the responsibility onto the police and 'hooligan' elements for which the march organisers could not be responsible. Anecdotal evidence from independent observers suggest the contrary, and that groups of women were urging on the marchers by taunts to their 'manhood' [personal communication]. This woman activist recounted how she had encountered opposition from women members of the Orange Order:

> They keep on telling me I shouldn't make so much fuss about the marches, I should leave it to the men...

but asserted she had received a lot of support from younger women for her stand. At the same time, the (male) leadership of the loyalist paramilitary had threatened her "with guns at my head" if she would not keep her place.

It is of course possible to argue that this episode was 'exceptional'. However, there were several other discrepancies between a construction of 'women as peacemakers' and actual conduct, including the picket of Harryville Catholic Church. The church, surrounded by a Protestant residential area, holds a Saturday evening Family Mass which has become a focal point for a protest[50] against banning of an Orange march in a neighbouring viliage. Their position, as expressed to anyone who would listen, was that "If we can't get to our church, then we'll stop them [Catholics] getting to theirs".

The pickets of local people were initially largescale, with large crowds yelling abuse and, on occasion, stoning the cars of Mass-goers. A constant RUC presence has been mounted, but by November 1996 the numbers and intensity of the protest had been dropping. However, there was then a resurgence, with evidence that protestors were being bussed in from further afield.

The picketers have always included women. My own observation, confirmed by regular eyewitnesses, is that while the 'frontline' of the picket were young men, the women present were just as enthusiastic in shouting abuse at families arriving; once inside the church, the singing and chanting was organised so as to effect maximum disruption of the service.[51]

Evaluation of Category 1

Women who were within the formal political negotiations as a result of an electoral process remained divided along pre-existing lines. It is likely that standing on a platform which allowed for inclusive negotiations reflected a significant proportion of Northern Ireland's population as a whole, but this did not mean a one to one correlation between being a woman candidate and preparedness to drop pre-conditions for the sake of progress towards a political settlement. Opposition to the Coalition demonstrates that there was no necessary relationship between being a woman in the formal process and participating in a distinctive 'women's culture' of consensus and co-operation. At the same time, the treatment of the Coalition made manifest a particularly confrontational and male-dominated form of politics which had previously been regarded as the norm. Thus it is possible that there will be some different expectations if and when the multi-party talks get back on track. Recognition of the undoubted achievements of the Coalition have

not always been adequately contextualised in terms of its actual degree of electoral support and opposition from other women activists and Northern Irish women as a whole.

The high profile of the Coalition brought it a degree of media attention which was double-sided. Their treatment in the Forum became quite widely known and I found widespread sympathy and admiration,[52] even where there was no agreement with the supposed objectives of the Forum. One pithy expression of this was that, before the Coalition, ".. the nearest any women got to the negotiating table was when they were polishing it". This was, however, mixed with a degree of resigned acceptance that, after all, this was how men behaved and there was no real prospect of change. Outside the formal process women grouped themselves to support a variety of political positions that were not consistently associated with 'peace'.

Category 2: Making the Crossing

Despite the 'silences' referred to above, there have always been women's groups which have spoken out publicly against violence and shown the possibility of cross-community action. One example is the group Women Together, founded at the outset of the Troubles by a Protestant millworker. Its original purpose of bridging the religious divide by affirming the necessity for women to work for a nonviolent society entailed a challenge to male domination of politics and, in its early days, members received threats from both sides, with women attending their meetings being told to "Get your wigs ready" (a reference to the practice of shaving the heads of women 'collaborators').[53] More recently, their particular conceptualisation of peacemaking has involved an intensive programme of Talking and Listening Circles. These involve traditional women's groups, such as those concerned with voluntary work, in a complete departure from their customary activities by engaging with the 'forbidden areas'. Participants are therefore in a sufficiently safe space to be able to engage with experiences of sectarianism, including their own role in its maintenance, which they have experienced as intensely cathartic. This is seen as the first step to transformation, which is also assisted by symbolic interventions such as Christmas candles in memory of the dead or damaged of both communities and practical programmes, including holidays for bereaved families. They have also maintained a presence within the church grounds at Harryville involving Protestant as well as Catholic women.

Despite these achievements, the 1980s saw a degree of disillusionment with generalised 'women and peace' groups, with the emphasis shifting to community development activities focusing on specific localities and single issue campaigns.[54] To the extent that they were involved with the status quo, such as provision of services for children, then existing residential segregation meant that they were de facto confined to one community; at an institutional level:

> the whole range of problems and opportunities resulting from the interaction, or non-interaction, between Nationalism and Unionism, or Catholicism and Protestantism, has commonly been referred to as 'community relations'. The term has been developed by central policy makers and the community and voluntary sectors. It is seen as the responsibility of the community and voluntary sectors to implement, whilst supported and funded by government.[55]

To the extent that this perspective has become dominant, there is a complex and sometimes negative attitude:

> ...a public relations exercise by the security forces; a quick and easy way to access funding; fudging the issues of justice and deprivation; middle class guilt trips; 'tea and cucumber sandwiches'; government plots - whether British or Irish ...[56]

Despite the sense of relief associated with the 1994 ceasefires, this ambivalence remained in place; women community activists now found themselves faced with the unfamiliar situation of "having money thrown at us through the peace package [of the European Union funding]" but with the drawback of a whole new set of financial and administrative requirements. For example, small-scale programmes in rural areas to improve public transport to local hospitals or campaigns to get a safer footpath were faced with the necessity of constituting themselves formally as involved with 'cross-community' work in order to qualify for funding.

There is only space to give a few illustrations of these aspects, deliberately contrasted, but each with implications for a re-conceptualisation of peace. The 'Women in the Churches' project arose in relation to the programmes initiated by Lady Patricia Mayhew, the wife of the Northern Ireland Secretary during his period of office (which ended in May 1997). Women church members - and, in some denominations, ministers - had met on an inter-faith basis, sometimes particularly related to the Women's World Day of Prayer. As will be obvious from the material cited above, for virtually all the participants, this would represent a significant step and has sometimes involved them in standing out against disapproval from within their own communities and in new relationships with authority figures; as one noted:

> I'm sorry but I'm past the stage of saying "Excuse me Father, Yes, Minister" ....we have to stop being dependent on men in our churches ...

However, this approach did not offer any insights into the implications of Drumcree 1996, where significant numbers of the church-going population, including women, had demonstrated their preparedness to use violence to maintain division.

Other paradoxes are shown by the series of Women's Festivals organised in small towns in 1995/ 1996. These were presented to me on the one hand as being 'models' of cross-community initiatives and as a major drain on the time and energy of Community Development Officers without

addressing any of the real problems of women in rural areas, such as the prevalence of post-natal depression in younger women living in isolated households.

The history of the women's group from the Antrim Family Care Centre is also interesting. The Centre has had an important role in a Catholic housing estate with high levels of unemployment. During recent years, its women users have progressed from organising drop-in groups for mothers with young children to vocational courses for supporting children's reading skills as well as some 'fun and relaxation' courses for women of all ages. In doing this, they have encountered tensions within their own communities, with husbands, mothers-in-law and priests objecting to children being "left in the care of strangers". Their longterm objective is a centre of their own, but for the meantime they continue to operate in a Centre which is known as a Catholic initiative. Their first cross-community visits were tentative, such as going to a neighbouring Protestant estate, to discuss, for example, mother and toddler groups. One recalled:

> We would get into our wee red bus with our name written on the side and go off to one of the estates with Union Jacks and the Red Hand[57] everywhere and I'd think to myself "Well, I'd never have dreamt I would find myself going to a meeting in this road" ...

By the latter part of 1996, however, they had built up sufficient expertise and confidence to undertake the organisation of a one-day women's conference to discuss the implications of Drumcree 1996 which, they all agreed, had affected them deeply:

> Although we used to joke about it - you know, tell people that if they didn't behave we would send them off to Drumcree - in fact we felt what had happened was terrible and that we had to find a way of talking about it ...so we sent out these invitations, we didn't have an idea of what the response would be ... and 200 women came!

Evaluation of Category 2

The organisations in this category often protested to me that "they were not involved with politics", but their activities contained implicit or explicit demands which are inseparable from, though not identical with, the political process. Their members have all, to some extent, been prepared to run risks in terms of their existing social relationships; criticism had been encountered from husbands, mothers and mothers-in-law and priests/ministers. In this way, they have built on existing foundations to make a distinctive contribution to deepening the conceptualisation of a peaceful society in Northern Ireland. However, there are a number of qualifying features to take into account. Firstly, while it would be quite inaccurate to describe this sector as 'middle-class', it is still necessary to bear in mind the effects of class divisions between women, so as not to generalise between communities with very different living conditions. Moreover, women's groups may be

affected by generational differences. Both Women Together and the Antrim group realised that violence against women remained a very difficult area for older women, meaning that the phenomenon of 'silences' between women is still a factor.

Secondly,where these organisations maintain that there is a special relationship between 'women' and 'peace', then they have been unable to account for the actual conduct of women other than by assigning them to the category of exceptional, leading to the unvoiced but sometimes implied criticism that those who *are* prepared to be confrontational are not 'proper women'.

There is a very complex relationship between women working together at grassroots level and the demands of the state and of donors. Several informants have noted that the prioritisation of cross-community work, such as contained in the terms of reference of the EC's Peace and Reconciliation Fund, can in fact operate to undermine the hard-won progress made by local initiatives.

Category 3: The Women's Movement

It may appear invidious to cordon off one area of women's activities under this rubric - all the organisations covered above contribute to a 'women's movement' in some form. However, the distinction becomes more evident when examining differing positions on the nature of 'the body politic', especially on issues such as reproductive choice and sexuality. Not surprisingly, the Northern Ireland's Women's Movement has not been able to distance itself from issues of national identity, producing splits and counter-movements and "battles that have been both an effect and a cause of such intense divisions among the population that the creation of a movement claiming to represent the interests of all women always appeared problematic".[58] However, the capacity to make common ground in certain contexts has never disappeared, as the expanding network of women's centres demonstrates. These may provide the only point of access at grassroots level for women's training and on issues of rape and violence. The Shankill Centre mounted a joint protest to Belfast City Council when funding for the Falls Centre was cut off - despite their location in archetypally contrasted areas.[59] One of their most distinctive contributions has been to open up spaces for women's writing, allowing expression of experiences such as those illustrated in the poems of Appendix III.

The relationship between the women's movement and the political process is particularly relevant in the context of reproductive rights. Abortion is illegal (except as 'therapeutic' operations under specially defined circumstances) since the 1967 British legislation has never been extended to Northern Ireland. Proposals to alter the legislation remain 'taboo' for all political parties, whatever

their stated commitment to gender issues and despite opinion polls over the past three years which demonstrate that there is majority support for at least some forms of legal termination.[60] Even those women awarded a highly important role, such as republican prisoners, have not been able to shift the position of their party; a pro-choice motion from the Maghaberry women's prisoners was resoundingly defeated at Sinn Fein's *Ard Fheis* (conference) in 1996.[61] Openly feminist groups can support abortion rights but community-based centres have to be much more cautious, for fear of adverse publicity which will affect their funding. Yet they still have to try to help women and girls desperate about raising sufficient money to travel to Britain in sufficient time for a termination.[62] Conservative estimates place the figure of women travelling to England to obtain abortions at 2,000 a year.[63] The stress and isolation involved in this situation mean that women can feel at risk for reasons quite separate to 'political' violence.

Because of their previous work on placing gender issues into the public domain, the women's movement was in a strong position to identify implications of exclusion of women's voices in the post-ceasefire period as more than 'accidental'. A major conference, 'Beyond Violence', was reminded that "Women have provided the stability and emotional support which has kept families and communities together throughout The Troubles...[but] not only were women powerless during the violence but we were being sidelined in peacetime as well."[64] One outcome has been that the Downtown Women's Centre in Belfast succeeded in getting European Union funding for the *Women into Politics* project which will target existing women activists and provide them with the necessary skills and confidence-building to provide "a pro-active vehicle for changing the status of women in politics".[65]

As before the ceasefires, women from both communities have made common cause by forming joint delegations, sometimes with deeply signficiant effect on their own perceptions of 'the struggle'. One such participant to an international meeting recalled that:

> The first time I heard first hand about what the ceasefires had meant to Protestant women was when they talked about it in Spain [where the three contingents met]

As the heady ceasefire atmosphere dissolved, women and men activists needed to become mindful of personal security again; there was, however, another gender-specific element at work associated with the claim for autonomous operation. The visit of the Irish head of state, President Mary Robinson, to the Windsor Women's Centre in a Protestant area of Belfast to affirm her support for their activities had provoked a petrol bomb attack which temporarily closed it down; further attacks followed, along with the creation of a 'Concerned Residents' group which, amongst other demands, has demanded that men be included on the Centre's Management Committee, in direct contravention of its original purpose of providing a space for autonomous activity.[66]

Evaluation of Category 3

The women's movement has, by its nature, always been involved with conceptualisation of notions of peace and security within Northern Ireland. Its members' insistence on placing the association between 'masculinity' and violence into the public arena is inseparable from any vision of a post-settlement society and there is evidence of a response from other women's organisations which nevertheless reject the description of 'feminist'. There are parallel processes, outside the range of this paper, in terms of reviewing concepts of 'fair' employment from a gender rather than religious perspective.[67] This contribution has had its costs; apart from the burden of work involved in supporting chronically under-funded initiatives, there are the obvious risks to personal and professional relationships involved in taking these critical positions, not excluding relationships with other women.

Conclusion: Facing up to Peace

It will, I hope, be obvious from this paper that women's organisations have already had a significant input into the peace process. At a minimal level, the category of women's political groupings has altered 'the face of politics'; more significantly, they have forced the parties to at least consider previously sidelined issues of representation and accountability. There remain, however, large unresolved and contested areas, particularly around the notion of a distinctive 'women's culture' of politics as propounded by some commentators on the Coalition.[68]

A political settlement in Northern Ireland would signify both transformation and continuity for women. There is accumulating evidence pointing towards 'gendered peace processes' where women's voices are marginalised, whether or not they have been involved as agents in the preceeding struggle.[69] Even if the struggle for inclusion in the negotiations is on its way to being won, the concept of 'women's interests' will need to be re-defined. A prime example is the area of contentious parades. The new British government has signalled its intention to establish a Parades Commission and it remains to be seen how this will integrate the range of positions taken by women, as outlined above. Can respect for tradition accommodate cultural pluralism other than in the ways depicted all too accurately in the cartoon reproduced in Appendix III?

Women's organisations will have to accustom themselves to new sets of questions, especially in the area of resource allocation and 'security'.[70] If there is going to be backing for integrated schools, can these also serve girls' interests as well as the existing system? If the RUC is to be totally re-structured, then what kind of career will it offer to women?[71] Areas which have had

extensive experience of paramilitary activity will obviously have a particular need for alternative means of dealing with intra-community conflict. The experience of women in other contemporary societies which have achieved a political settlement provides some warning signals. There are reports from non-governmental and church groups in Central America of a marked escalation of 'domestic' violence coinciding with the demobilisation of armed forces and the release of 'political' prisoners in South Africa and Northern Ireland has also been anecdotally linked with this rise.[72]

The influx of public funds to community organisations also needs a set of accountable structures. It is still too early to assess the impact of the District Partnerships established under the aegis of the European Community's Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (the 'peace package'), covering all the 26 District Council areas and pulling together representatives of local government, the voluntary and community sector, business and trade union interests and public bodies. However, given women's particularly rich relationship to local-level activities, it will be particularly important to ensure their participation, but not at the cost of simply adding it on to their existing workloads. Will there be any sanctions applied to recipients of grants who patently fail to fulfill their obligations to women in their communities?

These questions must not be confined to women in Northern Ireland alone. At present, as is belatedly becoming acknowledged, feminist scholarship in Britain has all too often been content to construct the entire island of 'Ireland' as 'Other'[73] and to regard the financial, political and human costs of the conflict as something inaccessible to understanding. As a result, Northern Ireland has borne a level of deaths and distress that, it can safely be assumed, would never have been tolerated if it had occurred on the soil of Great Britain.

This briefing has, unsurprisingly, no definitive answer as to whether women are 'more peaceful' than men. It can only assert that the notion that women who show agency in sustaining sectarian violence cannot meaningfully be dismissed as 'exceptional'. In this respect, the reflection of Marie Smyth seems particularly germane:

> I do not believe women are morally superior to men, but women have experience of achieving change and of oppression at close quarters - women know about intimate enmity. This small piece of contested territory which we live on is riven with conflict between close neighbours. We require new solutions to antagonisms, and new energy to give them voice.[74]

Notes

1. Morgan, Valerie, *'Peacemakers? Peacekeepers? Women in Northern Ireland 1969-1995*, Occasional Paper 3, INCORE, University of Ulster, 1996

2. See, for example, Waylen, Georgina, 'Rethinking Participation and Protest: Chile 1970-1990', in *Political Studies*, XL, 1992 ; Bock and James (eds), *Equality and Difference*, Routledge, 1992; Jones, Kathleen, 'Citizenship in a Women-friendly Polity', in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 15, No.4, 1990; Jacobson, Ruth, *Conceptualising Women's Citizenship in Southern Africa*, Ph.D., Bradford University, 1997.

3. Miller, Robert, Wilford, Rick and Donoghue, Freda, *Women and Political Participation in Northern Ireland*, Avebury, Aldershot, p. 25.

4. McWilliams, Monica and Spence, Lynda, *Taking Domestic Violence Seriously*, Report to the Northern Ireland Office, The Stationery Office, Belfast, 1996

5. The IRA proclaimed a ceasefire in August 1994 followed by the CLMC (loyalist paramilitaries) in November 1994. In February 1996, the IRA ceasefire ended with the Canary Wharf bombing while the loyalists' remained formally in place; however, there have been sectarian killings mounted by both sides up until the end of the research period.

6. Morgan, V., op. cit., p. 3

7. Ruane, Joseph and Todd, Jennifer, *The dynamics of conflict in Northern Ireland: Power, conflict and emancipation*, Cambridge University Press, 1996

8. In view of the fact that a considerable percentage of material quoted was given on the basis of confidentiality, speakers will not be personally identified unless their comments were specifically 'for public consumption', i.e. given to newspapers/journals.

   The use of Derry/Londonderry is in recognition of the contested status of this city 's name.

9. In addition to the well-publicised role of IRA women in armed actions, they have been involved in a variety of support roles. 30 IRA women prisoners participated in the H-blocks 'dirty protests ' in the 1980s and in 1992, there were still 22 IRA women prisoners. Loyalist paramilitaries have banned women from 'active service' since the disbandment of the women's UDA in 1974 but this does not remove the likelihood that women have still been involved in some support roles. See, for example, Bruce, Steve, *The Red Hand: Protestant Paramilitaries in Northern Ireland*, Oxford University Press, 1992, in relation to Mina Browne

10. Stringer, P. and Robinson, G. (eds), *Social Attitudes in Northern Ireland*, Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1991.

11. Even though the incidence of part time employment among women has more than doubled in the province from 19% in 1971 to 39% in 1990, the overall economic activity rate of women as a whole in Northern Ireland is the second-lowest of all the UK regions. One reason for this is the fact that, despite having one of the youngest populations in the EC, Northern Ireland has the lowest amount of public child care provision, including shortages of places in training organisations and further education colleges, which penalises women returners

12. The data on political representation will be confined to the 4 parties with the most significant political presence: the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP); the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP); the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP); Sinn Fein (SF). There are minority parties which can sometimes have an important mediating role, such as the Alliance Party and the recently-formed new loyalist parties but, to date, these have not affected the balance of power

13. Prior to 1996, 9.2% of Westminster MP's were women and 12% of Dail Eireann (Irish parliament): Fearon, Kate, 'Introduction', *Power, Politics, Positioning: Women in Northern Ireland*, Democratic dialogue Report No.4, 1996

14. These figures are derived from Miller et al, op. cit., and 'Democratic Dialogue', *Power, Politics, Positionings: Women in Northern Ireland*, Report 4, 1996

15. Ibid

16. See, for example, Anderson, Don, *14 May Days: The Inside Story of the Loyalist Strike of 1974*, Gill and Macmillan, Dublin, 1994

17. Fearon, op. cit.

18. Cartoons and anecdotes abound to this effect

19. Adapted from Bruce and Alderdice, *Religious Belief and Behaviour*, Community Relations Council, Northern Ireland, 1992

20. Morgan, V., op cit, p. 17

21. Source: School Performance Information, 1992, Department of Education, Northern Ireland, 1993

22. Based on Morgan, Smyth, Robinson and Fraser, *Mixed Marriages in Northern Ireland*, Centre for the Study of Conflict, University of Ulster, 1996

23. This phrase from the Northern Irish poet Seamus Heaney about his society is quoted in Morgan, Valerie and Fraser, Grace, *The Company We Keep: Women Community and Organisations*, Centre for the Study of Conflict, University of Ulster, 1994

24. Morgan and Fraser, op. cit.

25. Ibid, p. 40

26. Ibid, p. 79

27. Demonstrated in the way loyalist paramilitaries dismiss the leadership of the SDLP, which has always been non-armed, as "Provos who don't have the balls to use a gun" Suzanne Breen, *Irish Times*, 3rd April 1993

28. The following information is based on Jarman, N, and Bryan, D., *Parades and Protests: A Discussion of Parading Disputes in Northern Ireland*, Centre for the Study of Conflict, University of Ulster, 1996

29. In the language heard on the streets, the references to the Pope are usually cruder

30. For details, see Bell, Desmond, *Acts of Union: Youth Culture and Sectarianism in Northern Ireland*, Macmillan, 1990

31. Quoted in 'Fear Has Returned', *The Guardian*, 29 February 1996

32. As presented at the Third Annual Conference on Ethnic Conflict, INCORE, University of Ulster, 27-29 June 1997

33. Quoted in *The Guardian*, 29 February 1996

34. For example, on boycotts of local traders

35. A report in *The Guardian*, 23 June 1997, states that punishment attacks increased fivefold since the ceasefires and calculated that in the 18 months preceeding June 1997, there were 218 loyalist and 233 republican shootings and beatings.

36. This included taunts to policeman at the barricades about what their wives were doing in their absence, sometimes from Orangemen who lived in the same community

37. As evidenced by subsequent court cases involving women

38. *Fortnight*, September/October 1996

39. Diane Greer, *Community Relations Journal*, Winter 1996/7, p. 3

40. A playgroup in Clough Orange Hall which included children from local Catholic, Protestant and Chinese families was burnt to the ground, with all its toys and equipment

41. Its 7,731 votes were only 1% of the total but, because of the procedures for allocation of seats, this gained representation at the multi-party talks along with two other minority parties and two seats in the Northern Ireland Forum for Political Dialogue

42. Quoted by David McKittrick, *The Independent*, 25 April 1997

43. This initially took the form of a letter to the June/July issue of *Women's News*, which has the widest circulation among women's centres. The letter carried 32 names, including some leading activists but it later transpired that not all of them had agreed to be signatories to the letter as it stood. One key point was that "We do not believe that our interests as women in this society can be guaranteed by voting for women candidates simply because they are women."

44. *Irish Times*, 17 May, 1996

45. *Fortnight*, September/October 1996

46. *Irish News*, 11 March 1997

47. Widely known as the daughter of the prominent republican and former Westminster MP Bernadette Devlin and an activist in her own right

48. *Irish News*, 9 January 1997

49. Personal interview, substantiated by press reports

50. No one group has claimed responsibility for the picket and it has been formally condemned by unionist politicians and the Orange order. The continuing support it has attracted is therefore indicative of the divisions between the 'established' leadership and more extreme groups within loyalism

51. When I attended the Mass on International Women's Day, there was the bizarre experience of hearing very 'normal' church announcements of, for example, forthcoming whist drives punctuated by the bellowing of Orange songs and slogans from the outside.

52. This was confirmed in discussion with community development workers involved with rural areas

53. The following is based on an interview with Ann Carr of Women Together, March 1997

54. Morgan, Valerie, 1996, op. cit., p.10

55. Paper by Eyben, Karin, Wilson, Derick and Morrow, Duncan, 'A Worthwhile Venture? Practically Investing in Equity, Diversity and Interdependence in Northern Ireland' at the Third International Conference of the Ethnic Studies Network, June 1997, INCORE/Centre for the Study of Conflict, University of Ulster

56. Ibid

57. This refers to the flag which has been adopted as a symbol of loyalism

58. Roulston, Carmel, 'Women on the Margin: The Women's Movements in Northern Ireland', in West, Lois (ed.), *Feminist Nationalism*, Routledge, 1997, p.41

59. Sales, Rosemary, 'Gender, Ethnicity and Politics: the Protestants of Northern Ireland', paper presented at the Annual Conference of the British Sociological Association, Reading University, April 1997

60. Fearon, Kate, 'The vexed case' in *Fortnight*, March 1996

61. *Irish Times*, 25 March 1996

62. O'Broin, Eoin, 'Still fighting for the right to choose' in *Fortnight*, February 1997

63. Fearon, K., op. cit.

64. Murray, Sonya, 'Rebuilding the Democratic Process', in Williamson, Arthur (ed.), *Beyond Violence: The role of voluntary and community action in building a sustainable peace in Northern Ireland*, The Community Relations Council, Belfast and Centre for Voluntary Action Studies, University of Ulster, 1995

65. Ibid, p. 64

66. *Women's News*, December 1996/January 1997, p. 9 and personal communication

67. Although this has not yet extended to looking at gender and disability

68. See, for example, McGilloway, Maria, 'Setting a new agenda: An Analysis of the Women's Coalition in the 1996 Northern Ireland Election', MSSc. dissertation, Department of Politics, 1996

69. See, for example, Jacobson, Ruth, *Gender and the 1994 Mozambican Elections*, Centre for Democratisation Studies Working Paper, University of Leeds, 1996

70. This also extends to the physical safety of gays and lesbians

71. Women serving in the RUC only won the right to bear arms - and the associated career benefits - as a result of a lengthy legal process against the Chief Constable's determination to keep them 'out of the frontline'

72. Pearce, Jenny, 'The Three Marias', Departmental Seminar, Department of Peace Studies, Bradford University, September 1995, and personal communications

73. See, for example, 'The Irish Issue: the British Question', Editorial in *Feminist Review*, No. 50, Summer 1995

74. 'Do I Not Know Who I Am?' in *Women's News*, December 1996/January 1997

APPENDIX I: Population and Patterns of Life

Demography

Demographic statistics are affected by reluctance of respondents to answer census questions on religion, but it is clear that the proportion of Catholics in Northern Ireland has increased from at least 33% in 1971 to approximately 40% in 1991 and that this is attributable in part to a continuing higher birthrate among Catholic families plus differences in the emigration rates. However, the rate of increase in the Catholic community is by no means bound to continue, given the indications of falling family numbers in the Catholic population. The significant element for present purposes is that the current Protestant-Catholic ratio can be read as 60-40.

Residential Segration

Separation in housing, established well before the 1970s, was intensified by the physical re-location of members of both sectors into areas where they felt safer and less exposed and now has its own dynamic, most noticeable in those areas such as Belfast where the numerical clustering appears dramatically.

In overall terms, half of the Northern Ireland population live in areas containing over 90% of one religion and only 7% in areas with roughly equal numbers. Census returns from 1991 show that in the majority of electoral wards, fewer than 10% declared themselves as members of the 'other' sector. Most public sector housing estates in the larger towns have become exclusively or almost exclusively Protestant or Catholic, sometimes with a total shift away from a previouly mixed situation. In most rural areas, historical patterns of land acquisition have preserved existing separation, except in some border areas where rural Protestant families have withdrawn to safer housing.

Employment

Discrimination against Catholics in jobs was a fundamental issue in the civil rights campaign. Fair Employment Agency investigations into patterns of employment by major employers such as banking, some major engineering firms, the universities and other major public/civil service employers, systematically revealed that more Protestants were employed than would have been expected and that some practices were failing to give full equality of opportunity to Catholics. External monitoring and the presence of legislative structures has had a definite effect on this form of discrimination.

However, smaller firms, which are outside these regulatory structures, remain marked by strongly segregated workforces. Monitoring for 1992 showed that 602 of the 843 smallest firms with between 26 and 50 employees and 209 of the 514 firms with between 51 and a hundred employees had fewer than 10 Protestants or Catholics in their workplace, leading to the very strong assumption that discriminatory structures from both sides continue to interact with structural problems of differential educational levels and deliberate discrimination.

Women's Employment Patterns

[from *Equality Now and Then*,
Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland, 1997]

	1976	1996
Women as percentage of work force	40	50
Percentage of women working outside the home/looking for work "economically active"	42	50
Gap between women's and men's pay expressed as a percentage	67	76

APPENDIX II: Historical Legacy

The island of Ireland was gradually colonised by Britain from the eleventh century, but the Ulster 'settlements' of Protestant English and Scottish in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were particularly significant. As well as the physical dispossession of the native Irish Catholic population from their land, this process established two opposed discourses. From the perspective of the settlers and their descendants, they were contributing to a grand scale 'civilising mission' of the British state while the Catholic and Gaelic speaking population saw themselves as constituting 'the true Irish', reinforced by the spiritual authority of the original Christian church [Todd and Ruane,1996:30].

This division has never been absolute. For example, the United Irishmen movement of the 1790s was an alliance of radical Presbyterians with Catholics. However, it continued to permeate political and social life in Northern Ireland in the form of 'the national question'. The struggle for autonomy from the British state gained impetus during the later 19th century, culminating in the war of independence in the first two decades of the 20th century. In constitutional form, this led to the post-1920 compromise, when the Goverment of Ireland Act created a parliament and separate institutional mechanisms for the six northeastern counties of the island of Ireland. The border between Northern Ireland and the (then) Irish Free State was drawn so as to ensure a Protestant majority who saw the Ulster Unionist Party as their 'natural' protectors - hence *unionist* as political identity overlapped with and reinforced religion.

This complex of power relations is often referred to by the name of the place where the Northern Ireland parliament sat - 'Stormont' - but it extended far beyond the strictly formal mechanisms of government into the everyday practices of social life. One important feature of this was the plethora of marches and parades of loyalist organisations. The other features of division and discrimination have been summarised in this form:

> The Unionist government in Northern Ireland, fearful of abandonment by Britain and of being overwhelmed by nationalism, created a political community in which the Catholic minority was represented as dangerous, alien and potentially treacherous. Repressive legislation, electoral gerrymandering, and religious discimination were employed to reinforce the Unionist power base [Roulston, 43]

Attempts at Settlement

Direct rule from Westminster was initially intended as a temporary measure to tide over until the structures of government could be reconstituted. However, initiatives from successive British

governments were all unsuccessful. In the early 1970s, a project for a power sharing executive combined with an all-Ireland council was brought down by the Ulster Worker's Council (an umbrella group of loyalist trade unionists and paramilitaries) and mass strikes which paralysed the economy by mobilising not just 'blue collar' workers but farmers and civil servants. In its wake, the British government sought to 'Ulsterise' the conflict by reducing the army presence in favour of a local security presence, which introduced new tensions in the area of human rights abuses.

The next significant stage was that resulting in the Anglo-Irish Agreement of November 1985 which, while reiterating Northern Ireland's constitutional status, also gave the government of the Republic of Ireland a role in policy-making and a permanent presence in Northern Ireland. This was perceived as a betrayal by the Protestant community and provoked large-scale protest.

In the early 1990s, another initiative involving the Irish government was mounted, marked by the Joint Declaration of the British and Irish governments at Downing Street, December 1993, containing the historic statement that the British government, had no "selfish strategic or economic interest" in Ireland. Hence, ultimately and with complex caveats, "it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish." [quoted in MacGinty, 1996:3]

During this period, a number of factors involving the Northern Irish political parties, the British, Irish and US governments were all converging to make an IRA ceasefire possible. These included the impact of the ending of the Cold war on British strategic thinking, and the fact that the balance of opinion in the international community was shifting towards support for the goal of a united Ireland but only if achieved without violence.

APPENDIX III: Election Outcomes in Northern Ireland, May 1996 and May 1997

NUMBER OF WOMEN ELECTED IN MAY 1996 FROM THE 4 MAJORITY PARTIES

Party	No. Women Elected	Total No. Elected	Female % of Total Elected
Sinn Fein	5	17	29
SDLP	3	21	14
DUP	3	24	12
UUP	1	30	3

MAY 1997 GENERAL ELECTIONS

NATIONALIST		UNIONIST		OTHER	
Sinn Fein	16.1%	UUP	32.7%	Alliance	8%
SDLP	24.1%	DUP	13.6%	NIWC	0.4% [in 3 constituencies]
		PUP	1.4%		
		[Other small unionist parties did not participate]			

Irish Times, 1995, reproduced by kind permission of Martyn Turner

APPENDIX IV: Women's Writing About Northern Ireland

Alternative Voices

Belfast Says No*

(Note: This poem was written during a further education creative writing course in Belfast and was read during a public event to an audience which included Belfast City Councillor Iris Robinson (UUP). She then made a complaint about the use of council-funded premises for production of 'anti-unionist' material. The women involved in the course were aware that they had been taking a risk, but were determined not to have their writing censured.)

Belfast says No
to religion of other
but under the skin
we're all sisters and brothers.

Belfast says No
to the man with the gun
if we give in
the bombers have won.

Belfast says No
with segregated schools
this system is churning out
bigoted fools.

Belfast says No
brave politicians say
but they are protected
by night and by day.

Belfast says no
to a life of normality
where peace in our time
won't be a reality.

Janet Flether in *Write to the Core*, a collection from Cregagh Writing Group, Greeenway Women's Press, 1992

* This was the slogan placed by the then Unionist-controlled Belfast City Council on the dome of Belfast City Hall as a protest against the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement

Security Forces

Ladies Night

(Note: This poem represents the distortion of family and social relationships which living in a militarised environment represents, particularly when the British forces are seen as enemies and therefore 'legitimate targets'.)

A dozen women settling round a table
in the community centre proudly
muralled in red-white-and-blue
scrolls, red hands with daggers,

unzip their winter jackets and wait
for me to give them something
they didn't know they had.
Last week it was the cooking demonstration,

tonight they're getting me, one of the other sort,
the creative writing woman, their guest
in spite of church and politics,
for I am trusted to remember

some hated school, some never learned to write.
I promise them in these two hours together
we will make a poem
pieced from all our lives.

We lay out scraps of stories on the table,
pregnancies and births - my own tale first,
a fragment from our female comedy
offered in all its colours. One decides

to risk me. She begins:
It was a military hospital,
and I a sergeant's wife.
First births are always hard,

but we sat up for officer's inspection
wearing nighties, with our army-issue babies
in their fishtank cots beside us,
the sheets perfectly folded.

It seems some password has been spoken.
In married quarters, says another,
we made love on mattresses
still wrapped in polythene

for fear of baby stains; the first three feet
of paintwork could be fingermarked,

but doortops must be polished daily
for spot checks, gardens paraded,

army wives always on duty.
Our child was nearly blinded once,
her father on manoeuvres;
they said he'd have to follow

the army of his family. He chose
to love us best. We live here now.
Legitimate targets. And she smiles at me,
over the rag-rug poem.

Grainne Tobin, from *Word of Mouth*, Blackstaff Press, 1996

Experiences of Emigration

Please Identify Yourself

(Note: There is an existing literature and musical culture around the experiences of predominantly Irish Catholic exile and emigration, but this refers to the way of life of the Protestant population both historically and today.)

British, more or less; Anglican, of a kind
In Cookstown, I dodge the less urgent question
when a friendly Ulsterbus driver raises it;
'You're not a Moneymore girl yourself?' he asks,
deadpan. I make a cowardly retrogression,
slip ten years back. 'No, I'm from New Zealand.'
'Are you now? Well, that's a coincidence:
the priest at Moneymore's a New Zealander.'
And there's the second question, unspoken.
Unanswered.
I go to Moneymore
anonymously, and stare at all three churches.

In Belfast, though, where sides have to be taken,
I stop compromising - not that you'd guess,
seeing me hatless there among the hatted,
neutral voyeur among the shining faces
in the glossy Martyrs' Memorial Free Church.
The man himself is cheerleader in the pulpit
for crusader chroruses: we're laved in blood,
marshalled in ranks. I chant the nursery tunes
and mentally cross myself. You can't stir me
with evangelistic hymns, Dr Paisley:
I know them. Nor with your computer-planned
sermon - Babylon, Revelation, whispers
of popery, slams at the IRA, more blood.

I scrawl incredulous notes under my hymnbook
and burn with Catholicism.
Later
hacking along the Lower Falls Road
against a gale, in my clerical black coat,
I meet a bright gust of tinselly children
in beads and lipstick and their mothers' dresses
for Hallowe'een; who chatter and surround me.
Overreacting once again (a custom
of the country, not mine alone) I give them
all my loose change for their rattling tin
and my blessing - little enough. But now
to my tough Presbyterian ancestors,
Brooks and Hamilton, lying in the graves
I couldn't find at Moneymore and Cookstown
among so many unlabelled bones, I say:
I embrace you also, my dears.

Fleur Adcock, in *A Rage for Order*, ed. Frank Ormsby

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